Report on a fieldwalk by the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society's Active Archaeology Group at Stoke Mandeville, Buckinghamshire, April 1st 2018

Michael Farley, with the assistance of Barbara Hurman

[July 2018]

Fieldwalk surveyors setting out during inhospitable March weather

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Introduction:

In the course of geophysical survey by GSB Prospection Ltd on behalf of HS2 Ltd in advance of construction, a cluster of features was identified in two adjoining fields east of the Stoke Mandeville old church site and south-east of Stoke House (Figs.1 and 2).).

As part of the site lay a little beyond the area which would be affected by the line, the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society (Active Archaeological Group) were asked by Fusion (Birmingham) on behalf of HS2, if a fieldwalk could be arranged in the northern of the two fields which had produced significant images. The results might be of assistance in developing an understanding of the wider landscape of the area around the church.

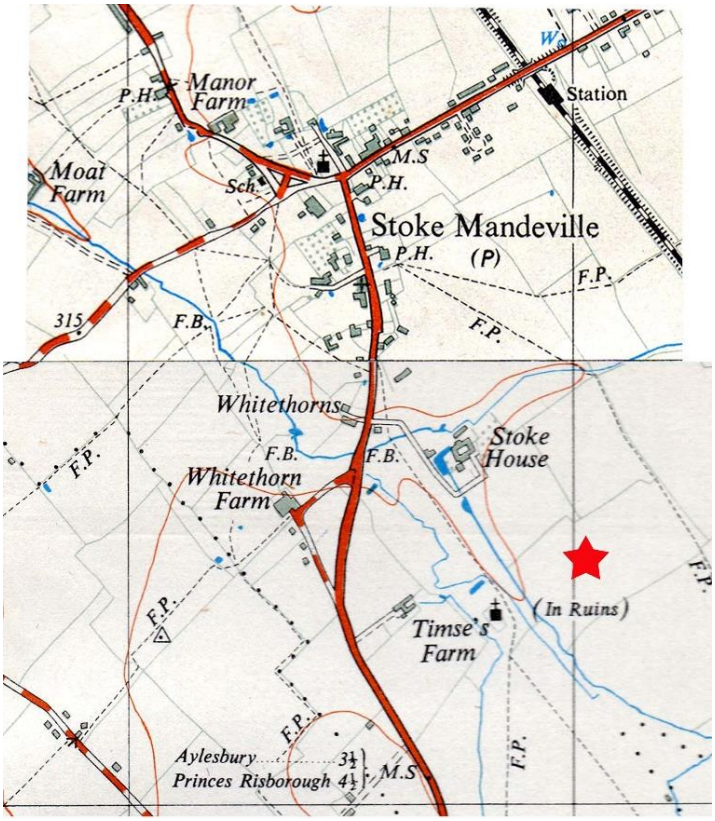


Fig. 1. Stoke Mandeville. Location of fieldwalk. Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 c. 1950. The field walked is indicated by a star ('In Ruins' refers to the church).

Fig.2. Oblique aerial view (March 2011) showing the location of the field walked and the old church site in the valley to the south-west (Michael Farley).

In the northern field the survey had located a rectangular ditched enclosure approximately 48x 48m with a possible entrance on the west side (Fig. 3). The enclosure lies approximately forty metres north of a probable north-east to south-west droveway with two or more enclosed fields adjoining on the southern side. The fields are cut by a recent hedgerow. It has been presumed that the enclosure and droveway etc, are contemporary, although the geophysical survey shows no connecting features apart from a modern removed field boundary.

The fieldwalk took place in the northern field, the centre being SP 8410 0952. The fieldwalk encompassed the entirely of the enclosure, much of the droveway and the north-western part of two fields (Fig. 3). The 1798 Inclosure map (Fig. 4) shows the northern boundary of the field to be present but not the present southern boundary. 1945 aerial photographs on

Google Earth show the former presence of ridge and furrow in the eastern half of the walked area and this is likely to have been much more extensive than shown on that source.

Fig 3. Aerial showing geophysical survey results plotted on a vertical air photograph (copyright HS2/ Fusion/ GSB Prospection Ltd). The rectangle shows the area walked.

Fig.4. Part of the Inclosure map of 1798 showing the church site, the whole of the northern walked field, and part of what was later to be divided off to form the southern field (courtesy Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies).

Local Topography:

The northern field slopes gently upwards from the old mill leat that formed its western boundary at 102m OD, rising to 108m OD in its north-east corner. It was otherwise fairly level at around 106m OD and the adjoining southern field was at a similar height.

The Geological Survey maps the solid geology of the area as 'Gault Formation and Upper Greensand Formation (undifferentiated)' but does not record any superficial deposits here *(mapapps.bgs,ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html)*. The nearest BGS-mapped superficial deposit is 'head' at Weston Turville, a village not far to the east. These latter have recently been discussed and are thought to be periglacial (Farley 2018).

On the surface of the walked field there was a fairly dense scatter of angular flints of varying colours and size (Fig.5) indicating the presence of superficial deposits. Although these might have originated from the nearby Chilterns via the local Wendover Gap, the varying cortical and core flint colours suggest a more complex history. Incidentally, one keen-eyed walker spotted an extremely small piece of flint with a pattern on the surface, a form of chalcedony (Fig.8). The only completely non-local rock fragments noted were a few small pieces of limestone.

Fig.5. Fieldwalkers. Note the presence of flints on the surface: inset a sample of the flints (millimetre scale).

This flinty surface might have produced a slightly more favourable environment for settlement than the underlying solid geology. Although also unmapped by BGS, it seems likely that alluvial deposits will be present bordering the brook that runs adjacent to the old church site.

The Historic Environment:

The old church site and its immediate locality has been considered in a recent publication (Marsden 2012) and neither it nor Stoke House (a replacement for an earlier building which lay to the south and can be seen on Fig 4), are discussed here. Many local features and finds are recorded in the County Council's Historic Environment Record to the west and north of the leat that forms the western boundary of the field that was walked and which served a watermill near Stoke House, but the only immediately local record is the site of a windmill HER 4299) shown on a map of 1788 in the southern of the two fields discussed here.

The Fieldwalk:

A rectangular area encompassing the principal features identified by geophysical survey was walked. Walk line-spacing was 15m and ten lines were walked (K-T). Stint distance was also 15m per unit (numbered 10-21) giving a total of 120 units and a walked area of a little over 135 x 180m. Twelve walkers were involved overall. Four of the walkers with considerable experience were interspersed with those who had less or no experience.

Although recently ploughed with considerable plough ridges surviving, recent snow and rain had washed surface material clean giving good search conditions (Fig. 5). Despite recent heavy rain the surface was relatively dry underfoot, probably due to field drains.

A map owned by the landowner shows that slag was spread on the field in 1938. A few large lumps were observed but not collected.

Post-excavation:

During the fieldwalk it soon became obvious that 'finds' of any character were rare and were generally of very small size. There were notably few pieces of medieval and later roof tile, post-medieval pottery, or animal bone. As these items were likely to be uninformative about early land use it was decided to discard all retrieved material of this nature on initial sorting and prior to washing (apart from five particularly distinct post-medieval pottery sherds). Formless pieces of iron were also discarded apart from a possible handle of late date.

A spreadsheet listing all of the retained finds is included in Appendix A. The weight of prehistoric and Roman sherds is noted but not the weight of the small number of Saxon and medieval sherds. On the spreadsheet stints where nothing of significance was recovered are not included.

a) Pottery Introduction

The small number of sherds recovered (122 excluding post-medieval) was surprising. Almost all were very small, the average weight of all of the prehistoric and Romano-British sherds was 4.4gms and the size rarely more than 30mm across. The weight may be compared for example with excavated material from Broughton in Milton Keynes (Atkins et al 2014, 38-41) where flint-gritted Fabric A sherds (see below) averaged 8 gms.

Only one certain and one possible instances of featured sherds (that is with e.g. an identifiable rim or decoration) were present among the prehistoric pottery. This did not make identification easy and accounts for the number of undated sherds on the spreadsheat.

The numbers of identified sherds were:

Prehistoric 31, Romano-British 55, (?) Early-Mid Saxon 1, Medieval 8, post-Mediaeval (retained sherds only) 5, and undated sherds 25.

Sherds were examined with an x10 lens. Fabric description of the prehistoric and Saxon material only is given below.

b) Prehistoric sherds

Fabric A. Frequent flint grit, flint rarely larger than c.0.8mm but enough to give a slightly rough surface. No other obvious filler. Sherds usually fairly thin – around 7mm. Majority oxidised on the outside of the vessel and slightly reduced in its interior. Handmade. No rims or decorative features noted apart from one sherd from P19 where a larger than average sherd (16g) had a hint of a cordon. Fig.6 below left K20 shows a typical flint-grit sherd and right (a sherd with (?) trace of cordon).

Fig 6. Sherd fabric A: flint grits, left (K20), right with trace of cordon (?) P19 (millimetre scale).

Fabric B. Sparse flint grit sometimes less than two or three visible pieces in a sherd, grit generally less than 0.5mm. Smooth but slightly sandy feel, medium hard even fabric. No other obvious inclusions at x10. Generally fairly patchily reduced and sherds commonly slightly thicker (c.10mm) than Fabric A. Handmade. No burnish obvious on surface but nevertheless carefully finished. One small sherd (O20) might be from a shoulder or base and one (P21) has a trace of a groove. None illustrated.

Fabric C. A unique sherd (T19). Plentiful flint grit less than 1mm, heavily reduced, black interior and exterior, burnished with some sooting. Decorated with opposed incised diagonal

lines. Traces of a white inlay in short lengths of groove.(Fig. 7). Chinnor-Wandlebury style, see below.

Fig, 7. Sherd fabric C: decorated Chinnor –Wandlebury vessel T19 (millimetre scale).

There is no doubt that Fabric A is prehistoric. Flint grit is present locally in fabrics from the Neolithic, for example at Whiteleaf (Scott et al 1954), and the Eton Rowing Course (Allen et al 2013, 108) and through the Bronze Age, for example at Walton, Aylesbury (Dalwood et al 1989), Taplow (Allen et al (2009), Ivinghoe Beacon (Waugh 1968) and at sites excavated during construction of the Aston Clinton bypass (Slowikowski 2008, e.g. p.88). It was also ubiquitous at Chinnor on the Buckinghamshire/Oxfordshire border (Richardson and Young 1951 and see below) where associated finds indicated an early Iron Age date. The fabric was also present at Aylesbury's hillfort (Hurman 2012, 16) where a series of associated radiocarbon dates show it to have been still in use c.400 BC. In more northern parts of the county in the Milton Keynes area (Williams 1993 and Brown 2009), the fabric is rare in the Iron Age. Athough there seems to be no systematic survey of its extent in the region as a whole flint grit appears to become a minor component in later prehistoric pottery further

west in Oxfordshire, for example at Wittenham (Allen et al 2010) and Farmoor (Lambrick and Robinson (1970).

Fabric B is one of a wide range of fabrics loosely placed in the middle Iron Age in several localities. Further identification would depend on an association with forms (typically bowls and stubby rims) all of which are absent at Stoke Mandeville preventing further characterisation, however the associated types tend to be long-lived and contemporaneity with Fabric A is quite likely.

Fabric C (Fig.7) is associated with decorated vessels characterised by a black, highly burnished, surface that was first recorded many years ago on the Buckinghamshire/Oxfordshire border near Chinnor (Richardson and Young 1951) where there were also many Fabric A sherds. The forms were later discussed by Harding (1974), and subsequently defined as part of a Chinnor-Wandlebury group by Cunliffe (1974). All agree in placing the style in the early Iron Age (however defined). Forms are characteristically bowls with 'shoulders' and flaring rims and simple incised decoration (swags, triangles etc). The presence of white inlay (noted at Stoke Mandeville) is not mentioned in the Chinnor report or by Cunliffe, but it is recorded at Old Marston, Oxon (Harding 1974, 146, Fig.40D), and Blewburton Hill, Berks (Collins 1947, 19) and no doubt elsewhere.

c) Roman sherds

The varied fabric of the fifty-five small Romano-British sherds has not been recorded but a distinctive surface oxidation on a few might suggest the former presence of colour-coat for which the most likely source would be the Oxford potteries. A few thicker sherds had grog filler indicating perhaps an early Roman date. Three rims sherds were noted, and three bases including a pedestal foot. One sherd had a trace of a cordon.

d) Saxon sherds. One small (1 gm.) vegetation- tempered sherd was found (O21). This is a common fabric in the region, dateable to the sixth-eighth centuries.

e) Medieval sherds. Ten sherds probably of medieval fabric were recorded including two rims of which one had possible finger-tip decoration indicating a probable eleventh to twelfth century date.

f) Other finds

Prehistoric –

Two flint flakes were found, one from the walked area (N21) and another from elsewhere in the field (Z) (Fig. 8) From N21, a core trimming flake in black flint with one edge utilised. Cortex remaining in two places. From Z, a flake made from a pebble, black flint, probable utilisation on one edge.

Fig 8. Worked flints; left (N21) centre (Z), and right small flint with chalcedony-like surface (see below).

The small size and presence of cortex on these pieces suggests that the makers did not have access to good quality material and both may have been produced from flint available on site and may well be late Neolithic-Early Bronze Age.

The piece of ‘chalcedony’ in Fig.8 is included as a curio. Although nodules of this material can be associated with chalk in the Chilterns, often occurring within geodes, here the mineral appears only on the surface of the flint. The occurrences of chalcedony locally has recently been discussed by Michael Oates the *Newsletter of the Bucks Geology Group* Jan 2018.

Roman –

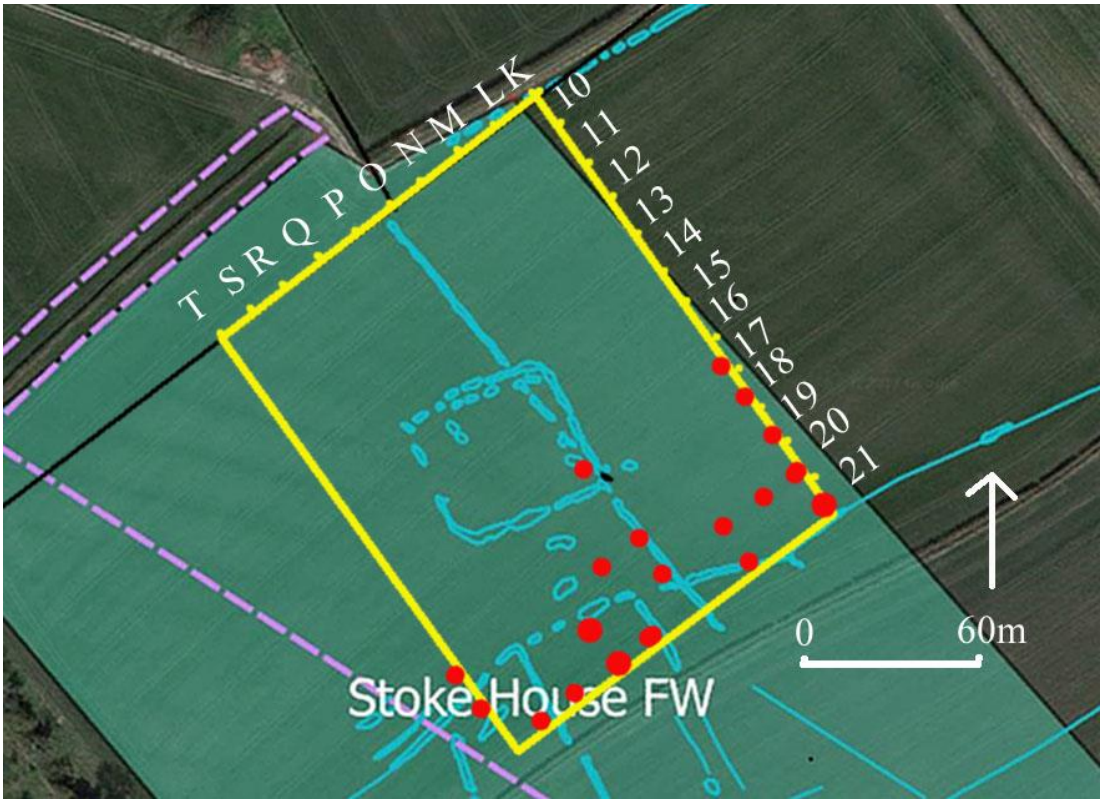
One piece of tegula (Roman roofing tile) was found just beyond the gridded area on the west (row J). A villa further south by the Icknield Way might have provided a source.

Post-medieval –

Apart from a small sample of pottery and handmade roof tile, two pieces of metal were retained, a piece of lead shot (M20) weight 13g, and an iron ?handle (L17). The neck of a green glass medicine bottle (M18) was also retained. Surprisingly only three pieces of clay pipe stem were collected (R14, S21, T15). That so few bits of this common post-medieval find were noted indicated that there was no occupation in the surveyed area at this date.

Undated – one piece of slag, possibly from a smithing hearth base, weight 15g. (P20)

The distribution of prehistoric and Romano-British sherds is shown on Figs 9 and 10 below.



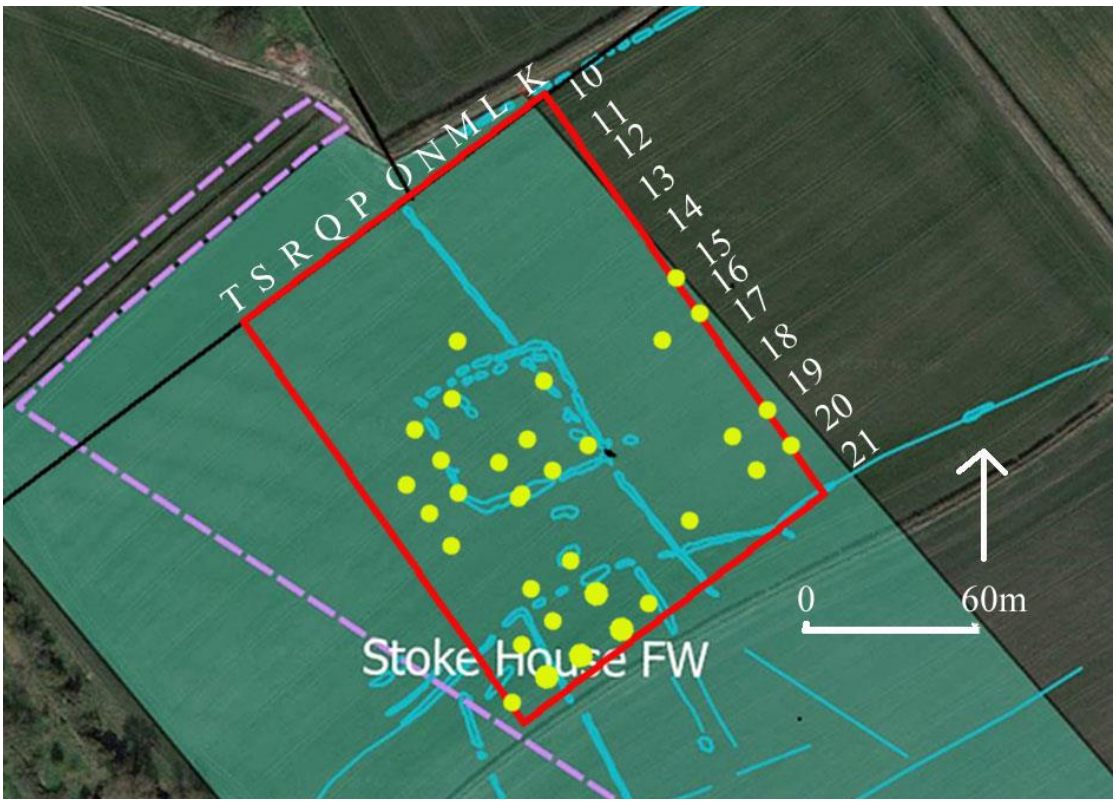


Fig.9 (top) Distribution of prehistoric sherds; smaller dot 1-2, larger 3-4: Fig. 10 (bottom) Distribution of Roman sherds; smaller dot 1-2, larger 3+

Discussion

The intention of the fieldwalk was to supply a date for the clear geophysical survey results. Unfortunately it cannot be said that the finds from the walk provide a straightforward answer.

The first point to make is that it is probable that the pottery finds represent two quite separate periods. Although placing a lot of weight on one sherd, the Chinnor-Wandlebury piece and flint-gritted ware makes a quite acceptable dating association of early – mid Iron Age date for this part of the assemblage. Although the fabric B sherds here have no obvious dateable features here elsewhere they would also readily fit within a middle Iron Age group. Flint-gritted pottery would not be expected on a late Iron Age-Romano-British transitional site and there are no obvious late Iron Age transitional forms between this early group and the identifiable Romano-British material (for which no close date is suggested here).

The second point is the lack of a clear association between sherds and the geophysical survey results. The distribution of finds of the two principal ceramic periods is shown on Figs. 9 and 10. The Romano-British pottery is distributed across all of the features but its greatest density is south of the droveway and into the fields. Apart from one sherd, the prehistoric pottery was not found within the enclosure but rather in the vicinity of the droveway. The only anomaly in the latter pattern is the presence of a greater amount of prehistoric sherds from row K which may represent a particularly experienced walker, but even here Iron Age sherds were concentrated south of the enclosure

The third point to note is the small size of the sherds - both Roman and prehistoric. For the Roman period this situation compares unfavourably with the product of several other fieldwalks in Buckinghamshire where Roman-period sites have frequently produced substantial amounts of ceramic, commonly in large and readily identifiable pieces. The relatively small size of sherds here is likely to reflect the result of frost action (particularly with the early pottery) coupled with the effect of intensive ploughing. A number of aerial photographs show the presence of ridge-and-furrow ploughing (mainly SE-NW in these fields) and this has also been detected by geophysical survey. The specific effect of ploughing on the distribution of finds may have seriously affected their present distribution. This effect has been clearly observed in Buckinghamshire on a Roman period site at Chalfont St Peter, where a hoard of Roman coins contained in pots was excavated. Metal detector finds showed that coins almost certainly derived from the disturbed pots were scattered up to some up to 14m distant from the vessels which originally contained them (Hunn and Farley 1995, Fig1). It may be in the case of Stoke Mandeville that the prehistoric material may have suffered more from this effect than the later.

The fourth point is that although it has been suggested that there are two periods of activity here, one during the early-mid Iron Age the other Romano-British, in theory, neither of them need relate to the creation of the enclosure and field system, although clearly they do relate in some way to its use. It's the result of excavations of sites elsewhere with broadly similar plans that demonstrates that an association between finds and the planform revealed by geophysical survey is extremely likely. Nevertheless there still remains the possibility that the enclosure and droveway field system are of separate dates since they are not directly connected (except by a former ploughed-out field boundary). Although a possibility this case will not be further argued here.

There seem to be no local parallels for Stoke Mandeville's neat free-standing enclosure. .Unfortunately, although there has been extensive excavation in recent years in advance of development in the Aylesbury area, (including of an Iron Age site a few hundred metres distant at Stoke Mandeville Care Home by Network Archaeology), most reports remain unpublished. A few older published sites where large scale investigation has taken place, such as Coldharbour Farm (Parkhouse and Bonner 1997) and the Aston Clinton by-pass (Masefield 2008), although producing evidence for fields and droveways etc, have not provided discrete rectangular enclosures directly comparable with the Stoke Mandeville site. However, one interesting point to emerge emerged from a study of both published and preliminary Aylesbury-focussed archaeological reports (Alqassar and Kidd (2018), is the existence of a common NW-SE alignment on prehistoric and Roman settlements in the area. The authors link this phenomenon to the existence of an early co-axial landscape of trackways, to which the Stoke Mandeville enclosure's orientation would certainly relate.

Further north in the Milton Keynes area, Oxley Park has a near- rectangular mid-Iron Age enclosure (Brown et al 2009, enclosure 15006) measuring 28x27m but linked to other features. Pennyland, also in Milton Keynes (Williams 1993) has a number of enclosures but all are best described as sub-rectangular. A recently published report on the Broughton area, also in Milton Keynes (Atkins et al 2014) does have a rectangular enclosure 21x21m but this is an unlikely parallel as it was formed by partitioning off an existing field and contained burials dated c.AD 10-150. No doubt more extensive research would bring closer parallels.

For the post-Roman period, the presence of one early-mid Saxon sherd is of interest but generally there is a fairly low correlation locally between Roman and early-middle Saxon sites. The few medieval sherds are unlikely to indicate settlement here but may well relate to settlement closer to the church.

So, although the general date of the geophysical evidence at Stoke Mandeville is not in doubt, closer dating could only be resolved by other methods of investigation.

Appendix A follows

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY ACTIVE ARCHAEOLOGICAL GROUP: FIELDWALK STOKE MANDEVILLE 1ST APRIL 2018

STINT NUMBER	POT PREHIST	WT GMS	POT RB	WT GMS	POT SAXON	POT MED	POT P-MED	POT ?DATE	WT GMS	TILE/ BRICK	CLAY PIPE	METAL	SLAG	WORKED FLINT	OTHER STONE	OTHER MATERIAL
K10										1						
K11										1						
K15			2	9												
K16			1	1												
K17	2	7														
K18	1	5						1	1							
K19	2	12	2	4												
K20	2	12	2	9												
K21	3	13														
L10										1						
L16			1	5												
L17												1				
L19			1	9												
L20	1	9	1	1											1	
L21															2	
M17																1
M18																
M19																
M20	2	7										1				
M21	1	5						1								
N20			1	11												
N21										1						
O11							1									
O15			1	3												
O17	2	4	1	7												
O19	1	4					2									
O20	2	11														
O21					1	1		1	4							
P13			2	7												
P16			1	1				1								
P17			2					2	4							
P18						1		1	6							
P19	1	16														
P20													1			
P21	1	2	1	10				1	2							
Q10							2									
Q14			1	5												
Q16			1	2				1	3							
Q17			1	20				1								
Q19			2	23												
Q20	4	13	3			1		4	8							
Q21	3	5	6					2								
R13							1									
R14			1	1							1					
R15			1	3												
R16			1	1												
R17							1	1	3							
R19			1	9		1		2	7							
R20			2	14												
R21	1	11	3	9		1										
S15			2	1		1		1	4							
S16			2	2				2								
S17			1	1												
S18							1									
S19						2										
S20	1	5	1	3		1	1	1	1							
S21			5	29		1		2	7	1	1					
T10															1	
T12														1		
T14															1	
T15										1	1					
T18															1	
T19	1	11														
T21			1	19												
J										1						
Z			1	4										1		
TOTAL	31	152	55	223	1	10	5	25	50	4	3	2			6	1
AV WT		4.9		4.1					2							

Acknowledgements

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The archive will be deposited at ****

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